Introduction to Sharh Al `Aqidah At Tahawiyyah

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The Islamic Creed
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All praise be to Allah. We seek His help and forgiveness and seek His refuge from ourselves and from our evil deeds. He whom Allah guided, no one can misguide. And He whom He did not guide, no one can guide. We testify that there is no deity save Allah, the One, who has no associates. And we testify that our master Muhammad, was His slave and Messenger, peace and blessing be on him and on his kinsfolk.

The best of knowledge in Islam is that of its fundamentals. People's dependence, therefore, on these is above any other dependence. For, the life of a heart depends upon knowledge concerning its Lord and the Object of its worship - in all its details, including His Names, Attributes and Acts. Now, since it is impossible for a man's mind to acquire this knowledge through its own efforts, in all its possible details, Allah's kindness demanded that Messengers be sent with this knowledge, inviting the people to it, giving glad tidings to those who answered the call and warning those who opposed it. Accordingly, the Messengers made this knowledge the central theme of their message. Upon its understanding depends a proper appreciation of their mission.

This is followed by two main principles:

Firstly, the way to reach it, viz., the understanding of the Shari'ah which deals with sanctions and prohibitions.

Secondly, the knowledge of what is in store for those who take up this path in terms of rewards and blessings; for, the most knowledgeable of Allah are those who i) follow most meticulously the path leading up to Him, and ii) those who know the bounties in store for them when they reach their goal. Consequently, we find that Allah the Most High referred to what He sent down to His messenger as "the soul" or "the spirit." That is because true life depends on it. He also called it 'Noor" for the reason that the path of guidance is illuminated by it. He said:

"He casts the Spirit of His bidding upon whomsoever He will of His slaves." (Ghafir, 15)

He also said:

"That is how We have revealed unto you (O Muhammad) the Spirit of Our bidding. You knew not before what was the Book nor what was Faith. But We made it a Light, guiding thereby whosoever We will of Our slaves. And, surely, you lead them to a straight path." (Al-Shura, 52)

No doubt that everyone is required to believe, in a general sense, in what the Prophet, peace be on him, brought. But the demand on the individuals depend on their specific needs. In fact, there are things that a common man need not be bothered about, such as those that are beyond his comprehension. But the same details might be essential for another. Upon one, for instance, who

has heard and understood the texts (Qur'an and *Sunnah),* those finer points become incumbent that are not incumbent upon one ignorant of them. Similarly, what is obligatory upon a jurist to know, or a doctor of the science *of hadith,* or a ruler, is not so upon one who does not hold such a position.

It should also be realized that most of those who erred in this field of knowledge, or failed to reach the true meaning, were either those who failed to follow what the Prophet, peace on him, brought, or those who refused to contemplate over what leads to its knowledge. When they abandoned the Book of Allah, they lost the way. Allah said about them:

"Therefore, whenever guidance comes to you from Me, then whosoever followed the guidance will not go unguided and will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. In contrast, whoever turned his back upon My remembrance, shall have a miserable life. We shall raise him blind on the Day of Judgement. He will say, 'My Lord. Why did You raise me blind, when I was of sight?' He will reply, 'That is how Our signs came to you but you forgot about them. That is how you shall be forgotten today.'" (Taha, 123-126)

We might also note that Allah the Most High declared Himself above what His slaves qualify Him with, save what the Messengers qualified Him with. He said:

ie., *"Glorified is Your Lord, the Lord of Honor and Might. (He is free) of what they ascribe (unto Him). And peace be upon the Messengers. And praise be to the Lord of the Worlds." (Al-Saffat, 180-182)*

Thus we see in the above text that Allah the Most High first declared Himself above what the pagans ascribed to Him. Then, after that, He granted peace to the Messengers for not committing the errors the pagans committed in matters concerning His Attributes. Finally, He praised Himself to confirm for Himself those Attributes that deserve praise.

After the Prophet, the tradition (of purity in Tawhid) continued through the Companions down to their immediate Followers, the earlier ones passing on the right concepts to the latter ones: all of them treading the same lines as those of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Allah Most High confirmed their right attitude when He said:

"Tell (them), "This is my path. I call you to Allah, with a certain knowledge - I and my Followers." (Yusuf 108)

But after them came a people who followed their caprices and broke apart from the mainstream. So Allah the Most High brought forth those who stood by and expounded the fundamental principles of His religion. The Prophet, peace be on him, had predicted this when he said: "A group from my followers will hold fast unto truth. No one opposed to them would be able to do them any harm."

One of those who rose up to defend the concepts of this religion was Muhammad b. Salamah al-Azadi al-Tahawi. He penned down what he knew as the beliefs of the righteous before him, drafting down what Imam Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man al-Kufi and his two disciples. Imam Abu Yusuf Ya'qub b. Ibrahim al-Himyari al-Ansari and Muhammad b. Hassan al-Shaybani, may Allah be pleased with them, believed to be the right beliefs of a Muslim.

However, as years passed by, heretics appeared, and, consequently, greater deviations took place. That became possible because those who popularized their deviations did it in the name of

interpretations to make them acceptable. For, there are few who can differentiate between a distortion and an interpretation. Quite often a word is given a meaning that could possibly be deduced from it, but did not happen to be the first meaning that the word would lend, despite the fact that the context wasn't demanding the meaning that was underscored. This was the root cause of corruptions in faith, for, when they named their distortions interpretations, they were accepted by all those who could not differentiate between the two.

In any case, there are kinds and classes of deviations. Some of them can be classified as outright disbelief. Others are simply corruptions. Yet others are sins and some, mere errors.

It is obligatory upon us to follow the messengers and what Allah revealed unto them. Allah completed their series with Muhammad (saws) and declared His Book the guardian over all other revelations. He declared the Prophet's obedience equal to His own obedience, his disobedience as His own disobedience and swore by Himself that the people would not be believers until they accepted him as the arbiter in all those affairs in which they disagreed among themselves.

The error that the majority of Muslims committed was that they gradually became ignorant of much of what the Prophet had brought, not only in matters concerning faith and belief, but also in matters that pertain to the rituals of worship, governance, etc. In their ignorance, they attributed to the Prophet things they had inherited from their forefathers, or removed from his message what originally was a part of it.

So, because of their ignorance, errors, and excesses, and because of their transgressions, hypocrisy entered in massive amounts which obliterated much of the knowledge brought by revelation.

This humble self, although not claiming complete knowledge, and weak of practice in their light, intends, nevertheless, to be undeserving of criticism by presenting the truth to others. He would feel happy at some people putting to good practice what he himself failed at. He takes up the task, however, not as one believing in a part of it and rejecting a part, rather, believing in the whole of it, and endeavors to keep off any of that which is not a part of it, whether it be an opinion or a narration of the past. He also refrains to follow what is not from Allah, be it a matter of faith or practice. Allah the Most High said:

"And do not overlay the truth with falsehood, while ye know." (Al-Baqarah, 42)

It was my keen desire to write down a commentary on the "Fundamentals of Faith" composed by Al-Tahawi, following the ways of the righteous of the past, weaving on their pattern, imitating them, child-like, so that I might be one of those who followed their ways, counted as one of them, and be raised in their company in the Hereafter:

"Among those whom Allah favored: the Prophets, the Siddiqun, the Martyrs and the righteous. And a good company are they." (Al- 'Imran, 69)